DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 108 CG 013 551

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TITLE Women: Managers Stuck in the Middle?
PUB DATE Sep 78
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Personnel; Communication Skills; *Females; *Group Dynamics; *Management Development; Organizational Communication; Psychological Studies; Self Evaluation; Social Development; *Supervisory Training; Task Performance

ABSTRACT

Promoting women into higher level organizational positions is vital as a social issue and a subject for organizational theory and research. Recently, Henning and Jardin have identified an internal factor that poses a problem to women and their job-related aspirations. The absence of long-term career commitment has been found to inhibit the sucessful transition from supervisory to managerial positions for women. Also, in contrast to men who see problems of upward job mobility as centering on people around them, women perceive them as centered on themselves. Women's inward preoccupation dulls their ability to assess other people objectively. As a result, they find it difficult to move from the role of supervisor-specialist to that of manager-generalist. (Author/PJC)

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Women: Managers Stuck in the Middle?[1]

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Promoting women into higher level organizational positions is both a vital social issue and an important subject for organizational theory and research. A number of factors have been identified which serve as barriers for the upwardly mobile occupational aspirations of women (cf. O'Leary, 1974, 1978; Terborg, 1977). Some of these factors such as societal sex-role stereotypes, attitudes toward female competence, and the prevalence of the "male" mangerial model are external to the woman herself but may create barriers to her job-related aspirations. Recently, Henning and Jardim (1977) have identified an internal factor,

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[1]In V.E. Schien (Chair), Obstacles in the Career Paths of Professional Women. Symposium presented at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, September, 1978.

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the absence of long-term career commitment, that may serve to inhibit the successful transition of women from supervisory to managerial positions. This transition is critical to the career pathing of those women who aspire to positions of power and prestige within organizations: positions that have been reserved for men traditionally.

In Henning and Jardim's view the close, non-delegative style, heavily dependent on self for performance and on formal structure and rules to define that performance represents a survival strategy for women along the path to middle management. Unfortunately, this very strategy, which is so effective in earning them accolades as outstanding supervisors inhibits women's prospects of moving beyond that role. In contrast to men, who see the problems facing them as they move into higher level management as centering on the people around them (i.e. on their abilities); women perceive the problems facing them as centered on themselves (i.e. on their own capacities or lack thereof).

Women's inward preoccupation, fostered by their socialization as "females", dulls their ability to assess other people objectively; to view others in terms of the impact they have on their own adequacy. As a result, they find it difficult to move from the role of supervisor-specialist to that of manager-generalist, and to utilize knowledge about group process in order to further their own goals.

In order to illustrate this phenomenon let me share with you a mixed-sex group interaction in which I was recently invovled. I was one of two women faculty members of a nine-person university-wide Faculty Retention and Promotion Committee. We were considering a case involving a colleague who had presented some research, as part of a dossier, which included data incorrectly analyzed and interpreted,

Hesitant, to confront the issue directly, the members of the committee who had experience with empirical research spent considerable time "talking around" the real question. My female colleague, who was elected as the Humanities representative to the committee, finally tired of the evasions and asked whether, in our view, the individual in question was naive or dishonest. A 45 second silence ensued, during which time there was a great deal of squirming. Someone then changed the subject. That evening she called me, upset because she had "displayed her ignorance of science" to her peers. She was flabergasted when I explained that the response to her question was not an embarrassed response to her "dumb" question, but an unwillingness to face the issue directly. She had focused inward, and misread the situational cues. Using environmental cues strategically in order to influence others maybe a learned response more characterstic of males than females.

The socialization experiences of boys emphases the importance of team effort. They learn early on the football field that accurate aim means little unless they can accurately access the probability that the receiver will be there to catch the ball. Girls do not often share such experiences. They are not trained to monitor environmental cues strategically in such as away as to enhance their ability to influence others.

In his original formulation of the self-monitoring construct, Synder (1974) defined it as "self observation and self-control guided by situational cues to social appropriateness" (Snyder, 1974, p. 526). Since that time, he has refined the defintion the construct to reflect the "use of communication skills for the purposes of impression management" (Synder, 1977, p. 145).

In order to explore the hypothesis that these particular skills are disportionately represented in samples of males as compared to females, Snyder's (1974) Self Monitoring Scale was administered to several samples of male and female undergraduate students, MBA students, and persons employed in supervisory and managerial positions.

In order to ascertain whether or not consistent sex differences in self-monitoring scores, favoring males did exist, Snyder's (1974) SM scale was administered to a sample of 263 students (174 female; 89 male) introductory level social science courses at a moderate-sized midwestern university. The mean score for females was 10.71, for males 12.59. This difference was significant at the .01 level. Similiar analysis of the SMS scores of 36 men and 24 women enrolled in a full-time MBA program failed to reveal significant differences between groups, although in a smaller sample (N=29) of men and women enrolled in an evening MBA program (all of whom were simutaneously employed full-time) significant differences were obtained in the predicted direction. Males scored significantly higher than females on self-monitoring ($\bar{x}$ = 14.3 vs. 11.72 $p < .01$).

Interestingly, the mean SM score of a group of 89 women attending a women in middle management seminar was 11.07. Unfortunately, data for a comparable group of men is not yet available, although based on the other analyses reported it is not unreasonable to anticipate that the mean scores of male middle-mangers will be higher than those of their females counterparts.

My own experience leading workshops for women in middle management lends some credence to this hypothesis. After administering the SMS to three such groups of women, I discussed the hypothesis with them and

was struck by their ready understanding that this impression management skill was the very one that they believed they lacked, and the one in which their male peers excelled. Their interest was a pragmatic one, as they wanted to know if it was possible to learn to be better self-monitors. I believe that self-monitoring is a skill that can be taught, although further research is necessary to specify the key variables involved in its aquisition. Needless to say, such training would be of value to both women and men (not all of whom possess it).

Interestingly, in a very small sample of people employed in supervisory positions (11 men and 11 women) matched by job classification, age, and number of years experience which Kay Coleman and I analyzed this week, no signifcant differences in self-monitoring scores were obtained. First, the sample was comprised of persons defined by Henning and Jardim (1977) as specialists. They were not even representatives of middle management. Women are not the only ones who "get stuck in the middle", unable to make the transition. Men do too, and the men in this sample may have been those who did not have the skills to move beyond. Interestingly the mean SMS scores in this data set were lower for both males and females than any I have sampled to date ($\bar{X}$ = 7.90 vs. 8.46). Only three of the men and four of the women obtained scores over 12 (the maximum possible score is 25). If SMS scores are of potential predictive validity longitudinal data must be collected to determine whether "high scorers" are more successful in moving up in the organizational hierarchy than their low scoring counterparts.

In closing, I would just like to mention that I have begun to explore the possibility that impression management tactics are differentially utilized by women and men to reflect the differential goals they are taught to value (communion) versus (agency) (Bakan, 1966). For example,

the results of separate Chi square analyses of the 25 items comprising the SMS indicate that women are significantly more likely than men to report they are "good at making other people like them". Men, on the other hand, are significantly more likely than women to report that they can "readily argue for ideas in which they do not believe". Ickes (1978) has recently made a similiar suggestion.

The results I have reported today, are preliminary, the interpretations speculative. However, I am hopeful that my exploratory efforts have stimulated your thinking about these issues and may even lead to future investigations aimed at providing a theorectically based explanation for the well documented sex differences in occupational achievement with which we have become all too familiar.

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